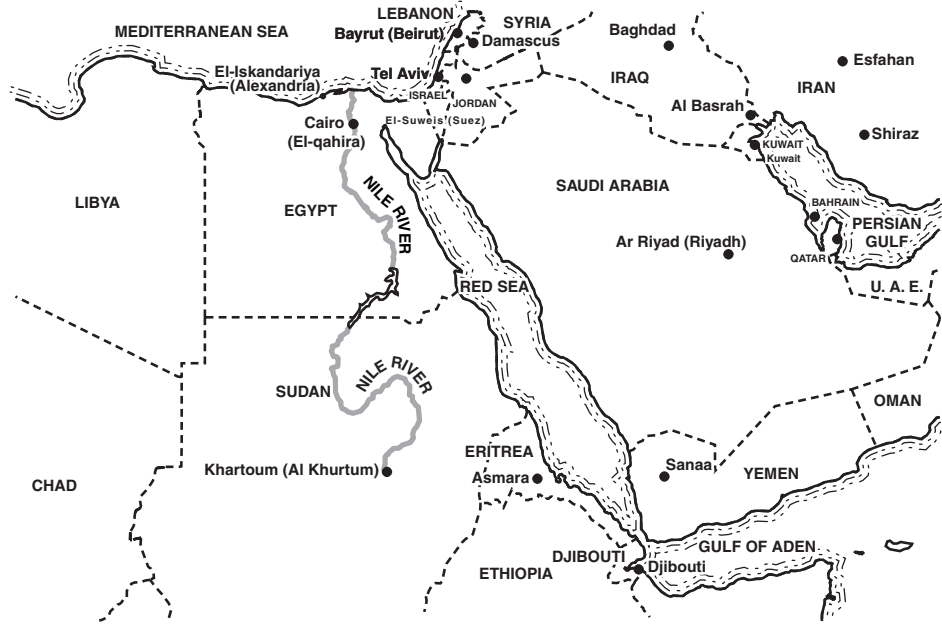


The Lifeline of the Nile

The Nile River is the longest river in the world. It begins in East Africa and flows northward into Egypt. Surrounded by hot, sandy deserts, the Nile brought life to the people who lived by it. In ancient Egypt, the Nile irrigated land that stretched about five miles on both sides of the river. This is where Egyptian civilization began and agriculture thrived.



The Nile overflowed because of heavy rains in east Africa. People living near the Nile planted seeds after the floods and harvested in late summer. They called this area “black land” because the land was very fertile. Wheat and barley were the most important crops in ancient Egypt. Papyrus was another valuable crop. The Egyptians used its stems to make paper. The papermaking process involved cutting thin strips from the plant’s stem and pressing them together. When the pressed strips dried, they produced a smooth surface. Papyrus became widely used for record keeping.

The Nile was also a means of transporting goods; however, the geography of the Nile caused some roadblocks for travelers. Six cataracts or waterfalls break up the flow of the Nile. The cataracts made it impossible to sail south to East Africa without taking a boat out of the water and carrying it. Because the river moves from south to north, a boat also needed sails to move it.

The Nile gave the Egyptians many gifts but it also caused problems. Although the Nile did flood regularly, it did not always do so in the same way. Sometimes heavy rains caused too much water to overflow. Crops were destroyed and people lost their lives. Other times, the Nile did not flood enough and crops could not grow. When this happened, Egyptians used the food they stored from surplus harvests.